

Tonga: Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai Volcano

ETC Situation Report #15

Reporting period: 01/12/2022 to 31/01/2023

The ETC in the Pacific was activated in 2016 under the structure of the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) to support telecommunications preparedness in the region. The ETC in the Pacific is currently supporting the response to the eruption of the Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha-apai (HTHH) underwater volcano and the subsequent tsunami which hit Tonga on 15 January 2022.

Highlights

- In early December, the ETC installed and tested a HF radio control station located in the MEIDECC communications centre in Nuku'alofa on the main island of Tongatapu. The control station will be connected to the new HF radio network planned for installation across five remote islands.
- Eight Tongan government response staff were trained in HF radio communications in a workshop held from 23 to 27 January. The training aimed to boost the skills and capacity of national responders to participate in the deployment of the planned HF radio network and to ensure the long-term sustainability of the solution.
- The user satisfaction survey report—which resulted in an overall user satisfaction rate of 93% for ETC services and activities delivered during the emergency response in Tonga—is now [available](#).



The ETC facilitated HF radio training on Tongatapu for eight government responders. Photo: WFP/Maria Shumusti

Situation overview

Up to 14 earthquakes were experienced in Tonga throughout December 2022 and into January 2023. The largest earthquake measured 5.5 in magnitude and occurred in 'Ohonua in 'Eua on 27 December. Government authorities urged the public to take special caution.

Internet Service Provider (ISP) data connectivity services in the outer islands of Tonga are still down until the section of the submarine Tonga Domestic Cable Extension (TDCE) damaged in the 15 January 2022 volcanic eruption is fully repaired. The estimated date for the domestic fibre cable repair is April 2023.

ETC Activities

Coordination and information management

The ETC in the Pacific continues to work with the Tongan Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications (MEIDECC) and the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) for emergency telecommunications response and capacity building in Tonga.

The ETC conducted a user satisfaction survey in Q4 2022 which resulted in an overall user satisfaction rate of 93% for ETC services and activities delivered in Tonga since the eruption of the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha’apai Volcano in January 2022. Read the full report [here](#).

The ETC mission of the NORCAP technician—who has been in country supporting the response to the Hunga-Tonga Hunga-Ha’apai volcanic eruption since July 2022—has been extended until 12 April 2023 to finalize ETC activities. The cluster is in the final phase of emergency telecommunications response implementation.

A WFP FITTEST¹ specialist will deploy to Tonga in February to support the installation of the HF and VHF radio networks.

MEIDECC/NEMO signed a Letter of Agreement (LoA) to reflect the standby partnership contribution of equipment and services provided in Tonga by global ETC partner, the Government of Luxembourg. The equipment was set up in August 2022 on the islands of Ha’apai and Vava’u to provide connectivity services in the Emergency Operations Centres (EOCs).

Data connectivity

A mission is scheduled from 4 February to realign the two Government of Luxembourg VSAT terminals providing connectivity to the EOCs on Ha’apai and Vava’u. The base of both units shifted during the seismic activity experienced over the past two months. Although connectivity is still operational in the EOCs, the services require this improvement.

HF radio communications

In early December, the ETC installed and successfully tested a HF radio control station located in the MEIDECC communications centre in Nuku’alofa on the main island of Tongatapu. The control station will be connected to the new HF radio network planned for installation across five remote islands—‘Eua, Ha’apai, Vava’u, Niuatoputapu, and Niuafo’ou. The new nationwide HF radio network will be a critical tool in keeping responders connected during emergencies.

Eight staff from MEIDECC, NEMO, and other government agencies were trained in HF radio communications in a week-long workshop from 23 to 27 January. During the training, successful test calls were made from the HF network deployed by the ETC on the Tongan mainland to Fiji and Australia. The training aimed to boost the skills and capacity of national responders to participate in the deployment of the planned HF radio network and to ensure the long-term sustainability of the solution.

¹ Fast IT and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team

Further, the seven HF radio systems that will be deployed to the remote islands were pre-configured and two HF radio systems in the Tongan Police Command and Communications Centre were restored. Technical support was also provided to configure two spare HF base stations provided to MEIDECC as part of a project related to the development of the national Early Warning System (EWS).

VHF radio communications

The final consignment of VHF radio equipment has been shipped to Tonga and is expected to arrive in mid-February. Once all the equipment is received in country, the VHF solution will be installed to augment the existing VHF coastal radio network in Tongatapu, 'Eua, Ha'apai, and Vava'u.

Additional Information

See the [ETC Dashboard](#) for an overview of planned and existing service locations.

Funding

The ETC and partners are using existing communications equipment in stock and in-kind contributions from partners to support the response in Tonga.

On 15 February 2022, funding of US\$250,000 was confirmed from the Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF) to support the ETC in the response to the volcano eruption and subsequent tsunami in Tonga. This funding was extended until October 2022 and is now fully utilized. The CERF funding covered the provision of HF emergency communications infrastructure capacity enhancement as well as the UAS systems and training, the operational cost for the VSAT deployments, the ICT control systems for MEIDECC Department of Communications, and supported ETC coordination and support activities.

A contribution of US\$217,000 was received from the Government of Japan to support the response. This funding is extended to March 2023. The Government of Japan funds are being utilised for the HF training components as well as the VHF capacity enhancement solution procurement, delivery, deployment, and additional operational activities.

Challenges

Logistical challenges continue to impact the timely shipment of equipment to Tonga, including disruptions in global supply chains, issues with import levies, and the availability of flights for cargo.

Meetings

The next Global ETC Joint teleconference on the response in Tonga will take place on **Wednesday 15 February 2023 at 08:00 UTC**.

Contacts

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All information related to the ETC response in Tonga can be found on the website:

www.etcluster.org/emergency/tonga-volcanic-eruptionsunami

For more information or to be added or deleted from the mailing list please contact:

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